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A BRITISH PRIVATEER IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

"I'm informed that you have had such Success with your Privateer that the Men of War are got jealous of her taking too many Prizes and have endeavoured to sink her, c'est bien malhonôte!" And so beyond question, thought that honest Scotch merchant and ardent loyalist, John Porteous,¹ of New York, in September, 1779, when he read the Montreal letter, written by his old-time friend, James Sterling, from which the sentence is quoted. Their friendship was of long standing, dating back to the fur-trading days that followed the close of the French War, when they had been partners at Detroit in the Indian trade and in many adventures on those distant trails that brought wealth from the great northern wilderness. Soon after the British army had occupied New York in 1776, John Porteous had followed it thither and had established himself in general merchandizing, occupying the store belonging to Henry Remsen, at No. 513 Hanover Square, "next door to the Admiral's." He enjoyed a good credit with his London connections; his brother, James Porteous, was an Assistant Commissary General in the British service, and the shrewd and thrifty Scotchman seems to have prospered in his undertakings. He preserved most of his papers with methodical care, and after his death, by some fortunate accident they escaped destruction, until, covered with a century's dust, they were recently brought to light from the old chest where they had so long lain hidden. There are many curious stories which these time-stained records tell, and among

¹ John Porteous came from Perth, Scotland, to America about the year 1761, and was one of the early British traders at Detroit and Michilimacinae. He was a resident of Detroit during its siege by Pontiac and for ten years thereafter. During this time he was engaged in the Indian trade as a partner with James Sterling in the firm of Duncan, Sterling and Porteous, and later formed a partnership with the firm of Phyn and Ellice, of Schenectady, N. Y. Before the opening of the Revolutionary War he went to Montreal, and after the British occupied New York City, he followed them there and carried on a general merchandizing business until the evacuation in 1783, when he returned to Scotland. Soon thereafter he settled in Nova Scotia, but in 1788 or 1789 went to Little Falls, N. Y., where he represented the interests of Alexander Ellice, who had succeeded to the lands covered by the Vaughn patent. He was naturalized in 1790, and lived at Little Falls until his death in March, 1799.

The papers forming the basis of this article were discovered among other business papers of Porteous in Buffalo, New York, and are now in the possession of the writer.

them is the story of the British Privateer "Vengeance," as told by those who shared her varied fortunes.

When Cornwallis entered Philadelphia in September, 1777, the opportunity seemed favorable for the British traders, and shortly thereafter John Porteous sent a stock of goods to that city entrusted to his friend and associate, John Richardson, who took a shop in Market street, where he had important dealings with Sir William Howe and many beside. The firm of John Porteous and Co. apparently owned at this time a snow called the "Elegante," of which Captain George Dean was the master, in which their shipments back and forth were made. Possibly our worthy Scotchman's close proximity to the "Admiral" may have turned his thoughts to other naval ventures than these peaceful sailings of the seas; perhaps he was like Dogberry, "a fellow that hath had losses," for once again from London, James Sterling wrote: "Pray how do you succeed in Privateering? I hope you've caught some of the Myneers¹ who will help to reimburse your former Losses." Perhaps privateering may have seemed as profitable at that time as it was popular, for in the year 1778 it was evidently determined to convert the peaceful "Elegante" into a more war-like craft, re-christened the "Vengeance," which, on the 17th of November, for a consideration of £37 6s. 8d. was duly commissioned as a privateer under the seal of the court of vice-admiralty for the province of New York, "to attack, Surprize, Seize and take all Ships and Vessels, Goods, Wares and Merchandizes, Chattels and Effects whatsoever belonging to the Inhabitants of the American Colonies in Rebellion."

A "snow" was a three masted vessel, having abaft the main mast, a third mast which carried a trysail. The "Vengeance" was a vessel of this class and was no beauty despite her original name; for one witness said she looked "like a Hog Frough," and another is equally disrespectful concerning her appearance, but, as the record shows, her good qualities far out-balanced this lack of grace. She was well armed, carrying six six-pound guns and eight four-pounders, with an abundance of small arms and ammunition, and, as appears from the details of her equipment, was amply supplied with provisions and with rum. The surgeon's instruments cost £18 10s. and a stock of medicines £76 4s. 6d. There had been added by purchase a new long boat which had cost £37 6s. 8d., a pinnace cost £100 7s., and at the hour of sailing, a very fine small boat which Captain Dean said he "could not possibly do without" for which John Porteous paid a round twenty guineas. Altogether, the vessel

¹ Myneers, a word of Dutch origin for Dutch merchantmen. The letter is dated 1781.

and her outfit when ready for sea represented an outlay to her owners of £4851 10s. 8d., York currency, equivalent at the time to about £3300 sterling. Of officers and crew there were sixty-nine on board when she sailed, with George Dean, Captain; George Knowles, 1st Lieut.; Charles Knowles, 2nd Lieut.; Thomas Middleton, master; John Fitzgerald, surgeon; John Fraser, gunner; and Patrick Henvey, boatswain, and including also John Richardson, who, like Captain Dean, was a shareholder and who went ostensibly to guard the owners' interests, but evidently moved by a fine spirit of adventure and bearing rank as captain of marines. To his facile pen and to that of the pugnacious captain, we are indebted for the most graphic account that has been preserved of the experiences of a British privateer during the war of the American Revolution.

By the 9th of January, 1779, all was ready, so that the "Vengeance" dropped down the bay and at three o'clock in the afternoon of the following day John Richardson found an opportunity of sending a farewell message from Sandy Hook.—"Yesterday afternoon it blowing fresh and the wind contrary we came to an Anchor off the Watering Place at Staten Island; and about 12 O'Clock today got under weigh;—we shall be abreast of the Man of War very soon and Capt: Dean is determined to proceed immediately to Sea on passing inspection." He concludes by "ardently hoping for a successful Cruize," and is not again heard from until the 15th of February when the "Vengeance" is in the latitude of Port Royal. At least one letter had been dispatched in the interim by the first prize captured, but as there is no trace of its receipt, and as the "Little Ben" never found a place on the credit side of the "Vengeance's" account, it is probable that the prize was re-captured before reaching New York. Captain Dean now writes:

VENGEANCE Lat: 32°.15' N. 15th Feb^y 1779

Dear Sir

My last was dated the 5th Current p^r the Prize Schooner *Little Ben* from Cape Fear bound to Boston John Anderson Prize Master, who I hope before this reaches you will have arrived safe. She was loaded with Tar Turpentine and Rice, is quite full and about 80 Tons burthen. On the 14th January 3 Sail of Vessels were Captured by the Privateers Experiment, Cap^t. M^r Pherson, and Gen^l. Mathew, Cap^t. Forsyth, in sight of us and within hearing of the Guns; which you'll please lay in a claim for a Proportion of according to Men and Guns. One was a dismasted Ship from Cape François bound to Charlestown, loaded with Run etc., another a Brig, and the third a Schooner which we chased in to them. All were taken off the Capes of Virginia, and it was my intention to put

some People on board them which being signified to Capt: Forsyth he even assented to coming too or laying by till morning when we would see each other again, but it growing hazy in the night, they gave us the Slip, next day we saw them again and fired several shot at the Sloop Genl. Mathew to bring her too, but without effect, however I am in hopes this ungenerous method of procedure will avail them little. On the 8th Cur. Captured the Ship Geo: Washington mounting 10 double fortified 4 pounders from Boston in Balast bound to Charlestown which I have ordered for Savannah in Georgia (it being in our possession) consigned to M^r. John Tunno, who is connected with M^r. Penman at St. Augustine, as Agent: She is 410 Tons burthen Frigate built and a beautiful Vessel. I remain with respect

Your sincere friend and hble Serv^t.

GEORGE DEAN

Accompanying this was a letter from John Richardson.

VENGEANCE Lat: 32 15' N. 15th Feb. 1779.

Dear Sir

I wrote you the 5th Current a few Lines. This will be delivered you by a M^r. J. [12] Mitchell of Boston, who was a Passenger on board the *Geo: Washington*: is a Portrait Painter and was intending by some means or other to get to England. Being a facetious young Fellow, and in all appearance a friend to Gov^t. Cap^t. Dean and all the officers on board the Vengeance have shown him every indulgence and civility, and make no doubt you will do the like. We at first took the Washington for a 40 Gun Ship she loomed so large, but upon getting a little nearer, saw she was a large Merchantman, which we were in hopes was French. She showed 14 Guns, besides 2 on her Quarter Deck. We were determin^d to have a look at her, and accordingly stood tow^d her under French Colours: she at same time bearing down on us under Rebel Colours. She by Accident made part of our Signal, which inducing us to believe she was the Union of Liverpool, we hoisted English: this caused her immediately to haul her Wind from us: and convinced us she was an enemy. At falling calm, we happily thought of trying what effect our Boats Oars would have in rowing the Snow. Our people being in high spirits pulled like heroes: We gained on her considerably, and she kept pelting us with Stern Chace which happily did little damage altho' almost every shot took place in our Sails. We fired only three Shot at her, and towed up under her stern, fired our Stink Pot and prepared for boarding, but before we came within lead she struck. Upon get^t nearer lead her, and finding her from Boston give three Cheers, which to our no small surprise was returned by a number on board the Ship. We found she was manned mostly with Scotchmen, whom the Captain had ordered to Prison Ships. They rejoiced in their release, and with great cheer to the Number of 20 entered with us. On the afternoon of the 7th Capt. Forsyth sent a Schooner to the Schooner to be a

large Ship stand^d for us. Apprehending her to be the Deane Frigate who came out of Boston with our Prize, kept close by the wind; but about 7 in the evening it being then dark found she was close under our Lee crossing us with her Larboard Tacks on board—we having our Starboard. She gave us a Gun: We returned her a 6 pounder shotted, yet I believe hit her—which was no sooner done than she gave us, and our Prize who was close under our Stern a Broadside and a Volley from her Tops and Quarter Deck, Luckily they did very little damage except to our Sails: but find^d them 9 pounders, were now convinced she was the Rebel frigate mentioned above; so Cap^t Dean and Officers, judged it most prudent to stand on. She immediately Tacked in our wake and stood after us. About 10 at night it falling light winds perceived she gained upon us: so finding it in vain to get clear, hauled up our Courses and prepared for Action along with our Prize: who was at this time commanded by Geo: Knowles, who I forgot to mention returned the Frigates broadside. She came up within Hail with all Sails standing, when we found it was his Majesty's Ship Unicorn, who behaved in a very civil manner. We were then off Cape Roman. Mess^r: Knowles join in best respects to you and Brother and I remain with unfeigned regard

Your sincere friend and humble Servant

JOHN RICHARDSON

P. S. We spoke Cap^t McAlpin in a Schooner from New York who informed us you was well. M^r. Andrews is gone Prize Master of the Ship who sails almost as well as we. Convoyed her almost to Georgia.

By an endorsement in his autograph, it appears that these letters were opened at New York by Commodore (afterward Admiral) Sir Hyde Parker, before being delivered to John Porteous to whom they were addressed. In December, 1778, Hyde Parker had commanded the small squadron which conveyed the British troops under Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell to the capture of Savannah, a service for which Parker was knighted in 1779. This important southern port now being in possession of the British, and the province declared to be "in the King's peace," Captain Dean thought it best to touch at Savannah for supplies and to see what had become of his fine prize ship, so about the 5th of March the "Vengeance" dropped anchor in the Savannah river and ten days later letters to New York told of the condition of her affairs which were not wholly to the Captain's liking.

SAVANNAH RIVER IN GEORGIA / 15th March 1779.
ON BOARD THE VENGEANCE

Dear Sir

Finding our Stock of Wood and Water to be getting rather short I determined to put into this place to get a recruit of these articles: It

was likewise some inducement to me to learn the fate of the Ship *Geo: Washington* (which we took on the 8th Feb^r bound from Boston to Charlestown in Balast) who by a Vessel we spoke with at Sea we were informed that she was claimed as British Property. Mr Tunno who I appointed Agent, and I dare say you remember to have seen at New York, as he lodged at Mr. Stoughton's dispatched her Papers to St. Augustine without delay, no Court of Admiralty being established here till within these few days: No answer is yet arrived but I am in hopes the claim will not be sustained, as the Claimant is a man of no character, and I have reason to believe was in a great measure induced to it by the Prize Master, *Charles Andreus*, who has proved a most cunning artful villain, and has done I find everything in his power to stir up sedition among the Ships Company—who were however proof against it and are a set of as fine peaceable fellows as ever manned a Ship. If I can find any Point Blank proof against him of making away with anything out of the Ship I will trounce him soundly for it—at any rate he and I shall never float at sea again in the same bottom. I shall order Mr. Tunno to remit you whatever may be the Nett Proceeds of the Ship, after deducting disbursements here, without delay, when she is sold. I had once determined on going as far as £3000 Sterling for her on our own account, as she sails very fast and would carry 24 Guns, six pounders with ease, but upon more mature deliberation have given up thoughts of that as the Expence of sending her round, and fitting would be so immense, that I am determined to stick by the *Old Vengeance*, who without jesting I would not exchange, for our business, with any Privateer belonging to New York: I find her to be possessed of every qualification necessary for a Privateer. Sails fast, carries her Guns well, makes no more water in a Gale of Wind than in a Calm; and in appearance at best but a Bundle of Boards. I am anxious to hear of the arrival at your Place of the Schooner *Little Ben* from Cape Fear bound to Boston, which we took on the 4th February, and of the *Snow Invermay* from Cape Francois, bound to Charlestown, Captured the 19th d^r; the first loaded with Tar, Turpentine and Rice, the latter with Rum, Sugar, Coffee and Dry Goods. There were a few trifling articles taken out of the *Snow* besides what I mentioned, which in the hurry we were in I forgot, viz the Jesuits Bark—pieces, Linen, I made a present of to the Master. No bread being to be had here, I have purchased as a substitute 15 Tierces Rice at 7 6 Stg. pr C, and some sweet Potatoes. I shall buy only about 10 Barrels Salt Provision, which can be had for about 6 Guineas pr Bbl; but as it is far cheaper and better for the people as many Hogs (which can be got about 3^d stg. pr lb.) as I can conveniently carry on Deck out of the way of the Guns. I am afraid I shall be obliged to get a punchon of Rum altho' dear, there is no doing without it in our way. We were once entirely out for eight days, but to do our People justice I never heard the least murmur on that account as they knew it could not be had.

One circumstance happened to us in the Beginning of the Cruise, which I cannot omit mentioning every opportunity altho' I can hardly do it with patience. If ever any one serves me such a Trick again, I will forgive him and never mention a word about it. On the 14th January a dismasted Ship from Cape Francois, bound to Charlestown, loaded with 'Taffia, etc, a Brig with her Main Topmast gone, and a Schooner, were captured off the Capes of Virginia by the Experiment Cap^t. M'Pherson and Gen^l. Mathew, Cap^t. Forsyth, both of New York, in sight of us and within hearing of their Guns. I spoke them and intended putting Prize Masters on board in the morning, which I even signified to Cap^t. Forsyth who appeared to have no objection, and agreed to lay by till morning—however it getting hazy in the night they gave us the Slip. Next day I saw them again and fired several shot to bring them to; upon which they put away before the wind. I hauled our wind for the Prizes, and put about when I thought we had got so far as to be able to fetch them on the other Tack, however we saw nothing more of them. I am hopeful some of my Letters may have reached you to enable you to lay in a claim for a share of said Prizes according to Men and Guns. I have cut out 2 more Ports, and got two four Pounders out of the Ship, and we now mount 6 six pounders and 10 four pounders. When we go out we shall have 70 Men, all fine fellows; almost 50 of whom are Seamen, and we shall not carry a man out here but what belonged to us when we came in; so that you see we have been very lucky in the Vessels we have taken to get so many seamen. I remain with great regard

Dear John

Yours Sincerely

GEORGE DEAN

There were uncertainties even in British privateering. The "Vengeance" might capture cargoes of rum and peaceful tar-laden merchantmen, but there were many things to be reckoned with before they could be taken into port, condemned and sold and their proceeds comfortably divided. There were well-armed Yankee ships with names fully as fierce as her own, whose captains would have delighted in a brush with the "Vengeance" herself, and who, failing this, found a peculiar pleasure in recapturing her prizes, which doubtless furnishes the providential reason why the "Invermay" as well as the "Little Ben" never figured further in the privateer's accounts. Then too there were such rascally schemes as that of the "George Washington's" prize master which stirred up Captain Dean's righteous indignation, as well it might, for although full details of procedures are not found, all that was ever credited to the account of the "Vengeance" in realization of her hopes from her splendid 440 ton prize for which Captain Dean would have paid £3000 sterling, was a beggarly item of "£374

ros. od." "for share of the George Washington salvage." However, all were now greatly elated with their early successes and their first lieutenant, George Knowles, who had been a merchant captain, wrote to John Porteous in exuberant phonetics.

"You will No Doubt hear nor larg from Capl. Dean of our Success and the Plisur the Snow gives out in hir sailing and Every thing that wie cann wish wie have goot a Compleat Sette of gunes as aney Ship out of New York sixtin sixes and four Pounders and 1 hoap for to have thre or four prizes in to you in the Spece of thre or four weakes after our puting from thence. Wie have a Compleat Shipes Compancy as Ever I sailed with 70 in number."

At the same time John Richardson also wrote to Mr. Porteous.

SAVANNAH RIVER IN GEORGIA)
ON BOARD THE VINGANCE) 15th March 1779

Dear Sir

We have been here now about 10 days, getting a fresh supply of Wood and Water, and some provisions, which are tolerably reasonable. I am hopeful the next prize we send you may be a good St. Domingo Man: Let us only see a Vessel and we are not afraid but we will soon come up with her, provided night does not prevent us. We sail exceedingly fast (having beat everything we have yet seen but the Unicorn) and are the greatest deception imaginable, looking at a distance like a Hog Trough: this no doubt will be a great advantage to us. The Master of the Snow we took told us, that even after he was in the Boat coming on board us, he secretly repented not having run longer: as he could hardly satisfy himself that we could sail *tolerably*, notwithstanding we had come up with him so fast that he did not know how to behave. M. Watson from New York informed us that it was currently reported there, our being cast away. I feel exceedingly for the distress and anxiety of mind you must have laboured under till the doubts respecting our safety were removed. There were people in New York, viz M Phetson and Forsyth, who could have satisfied you on this head, but knowing themselves guilty of wronging us in a very ungenerous manner, I suppose they determined to keep their own counsel, for fear enquiries might be made, that would put it out of their power to conceal any longer, our being in company, when the prizes were taken: and of consequence fully entitled to a share. I have sent you all the news Papers since the arrival of our Troops here, so that it is unnecessary to mention any news. The Phoenix Man of War sailed for England the 12th Cur. Col: Campbell went Passenger in her, and I suppose there never was a Commander whose departure was more regretted, he being universally beloved by all orders of People. Capl Dean and I being in Town when the Molly Cap. Thompson sailed for New York prevented our writing by her, as likewise to London by the Phoenix, not expect^t they would sail so soon.

This is the best Bar Harbour in America, having over it at Low Water

at least 3 fathoms. The Bar lies near 3 miles without the Light House or rather Beacon, which is built of Brick and Whitewashed; It consists of seven Stories, and stands upon the North Easternmost Point of Tybee, a low swampy Island, uninhabited, and abound^d with fine Pine and Live Oak Trees: Here we get whatever Spars we want (upon asking liberty) for the trouble of cutting them. About 3 miles up from the Light House is Cockspur Island which divides the River into 2 channels, the northernmost of which is the Ship Channel but between the Southside of the Island and Tybee is the best Anchorage. From Cockspur to within 5 miles of Savannah Town runs a range of swampy desert Islands, dividing the Channels as I ment^d before. The Banks of the River on both sides untill you come near to the Town (which is about 20 miles from Tybee Beacon) is a swamp. Here you can see multitudes of alligators lying in the mud like old Logs, and the Rivers in general here so abound with these destructive animals that it is very dangerous to go in to the Water. The Town stands upon a steep sandy Bank, which will put a man out of breath before he can reach the Top of it. It consists of about 300 houses, built for the most part of Wood. It is very regularly laid out, the Streets crossing each other at right angles, but like most other Towns in this Country very straggling built. The Streets are not paved; the Sand in them is near a foot deep, and in the summer, what between Sand Flies (of which even now there are Legions) Musquettoes etc *must certainly be a most agreeable place* to reside in. When it blows, a man runs no small risk of being chocked by the clouds of sand and dust. I am told that about 50 miles back, the Country exhibits a very different appearance, being very fruitful in Indigo, Rice, Indian Corn etc., and abounds with stock of all kinds; The sallow complexion of the Natives here, to me sufficiently proves the unhealthiness of the Climate. M^r. Michie desires his Compliments to you, he is in company with M^r. Brown, and they seem to have a great run. There is a pretty good demand for Goods here. M^r. McCulloch is appointed Collector of the Customs. Col: Innes is gone home. M^r. Penman¹ from St. Augustine is here. Of Privateers there are at present here, the Mars Cap^t. Cunningham, Union Cap^t Sibrell, and Surprize Cap^t. Watson, all of New York. Cap^t. Henry of the Fowey is now Commodore. I beg to be remembered to your Brother, M^r. Cruden: M^r. and M^r. Groome. I remain with the greatest regard

D^r. Sir

Yours very sincerely

JOHN RICHARDSON

During the month that followed these despatches, the "Vengeance" found business very dull. The rich St. Domingo mer-

¹ James Penman, a British loyalist, who was engaged in business at St. Augustine, Fla., until the capture of Savannah, Ga., in 1779, where he accompanied the British General, Augustine Prevost from Florida. After the capture of Savannah in 1779 and in the effort to re-establish the royal government there he was appointed a member of the council and a commissioner of claims under the Crown.

chantman wisely kept out of her way; she caught a glimpse of the Jamaica fleet sailing down the Georgia coast and somewhere thereabouts captured a "light brig," only to lose it again. Letters were sent by a St. Augustine sloop, but it would seem that they never reached New York and the next despatches received by the owners were written May 7th, somewhere off Albemarle Sound.

D. Sir

ON BOARD THE VENGEANCE Lat 36 North

On the 2^d Cur we in Company with the Privateer Sloop Who would have thought it, Cap^t. Lancefield belonging to M^r. Courtney, took the Schooner Fannie, John Sawyer Master from S. Croiz bound to Edenton, mounting 4 Carriage Guns and 3 Swivels, loaded with 78 Puncheons Rum and 1 Hhd. Sugar. There is likewise on board some small Casks Rum and Pieces of Dry Goods as annexed. I intended keeping her with me for some Days to Cruise as she would have answered every purpose of a Tender and for that Purpose put 6 of our best people on Board including the 1st Lieut. and the Sloop put the same number of his: but not obeying my signal for Tacking the ensuing night (whether from intention or neglect I know not) we lost Company of her, and heard nothing of her since. This has distressed me exceedingly to loose so many good men in so small a vessel and as I was in Chase all the afternoon had not time to make out M^r. Knowles's Orders, or send a Copy of our Commission, but Verbally desired him to keep by us. However I am hopeful she may arrive safe at New York as I have no doubt they will push directly for thence. On the 4th Cur I sent about 30 Volunteers on board the said Sloop and in our Pinnace, who went into Ocracock Harbour, boarded and took the French Polacco Ship Le Hardy Claude Berard M^r of 12 Carriage Guns, 4 Swivels and 26 Men, after a very obstinate resistance. We did not loose a Man, having only one a good deal Burnt by a Powder Flask, and the Sloop one of her people badly wounded in the head. The French Capt. and 3 of his People are dangerously wounded. She has on board 250 Hhds of Tobacco which I am hopeful will sell well being of the first Quality. The Ship is excellently found and sails very fast. There is a fine parcel of Bread aboard which should be glad you would purchase for our next Cruise. We shall come in for a great part of both Vessels as we had 63 Men on Board and 17 Carriage Guns, and the Sloop 6 Guns and about 26 men. Had the Schooner remained with me I should have been able to have cut out likewise a large Lumber loaded Ship which lay about 3 miles further up, who got under Sail and went still farther as soon as they saw our Intention against the Polacco. Our Water and Provisions begin to grow low, so that I shall not be able to cruise much longer. I am sorry to hear the light Brig we took and sent for Georgia, was retaken by the Brig Notre Dame of 16 Guns belonging to Charlestown, off Savannah Bar. I was so sure of her arriving safe that I would have insured her for sixpence. Should I catch any more of the Boston Victalliers (as we call them) I shall not hesitate

about burning them, as I cannot find they ever carry anything but a few notions. There is nothing I regret so much as not leaving orders with you to Commission for a good night Glass : it would have been of infinite service to me, however it may not yet be too late, therefore beg you will do it. Should the Schooner arrive, I request you will defer selling her till we arrive as I have a great opinion of her, and if the cruize can afford it, would like to purchase her for a Tender, finding that a small one would be of vast service. I am with respect, D^r. Sir

Your very humble Servant

GEORGE DEAN.

M^r. John Porteous.

P. S. M^r. Middleton the Master is sent as Prize Master of the Polacco who was altered from a Snow into a Ship lately at Edenton.

In the cabin of the Schooner

2 P^r Coating

2 P^r Broad Cloth with Shalloon and other Trimmings

In the hold about 400^{lb} Coffee

ON BOARD THE VENGEANCE Lat 36° N

7th May 1779

D. Sir

I wrote you the 22^d ultimo pr the Hunter Sloop Cap^t. Browne from St. Augustine and mentioned having seen the Jamaica fleet on the 16th April in and about Lat: 31-30 and Lon: 70° West. On the 26th April in the morning off Cape Look Out we gave Chace to a Sail which we soon discovered to be a brig standing towards us, but before we could see her hull she Tacked and stood from us with all Sail : we continued the Chace and falling almost calm we got out our Sweeps, and about 1 P M our Pinnace armed and manned as usual was dispatched after her : We came up very fast, but most unluckily about 2 a very heavy squall with Rain from the N W came on, in which the Snow loosing sight both of us and the Brig was obliged to heave too for fear of loosing us. We returned to the Snow, and the Boat was immediately hoisted in. About 5 in the evening We again discovered the Brig who had wore (when out of our sight) towards the Shore, and went close under the Shoals, by which means she had got about 2 Leagues to Windward. We continued the Pursuit and about night it falling calm : our Pinnace was hoisted out again and sent after her : We rowed directly towards her for 2 1/2 hours when seeing no appearance of a sail, M^r. Knowles and I judged it prudent to return. Got on board the Vessel about 1 next morning : it still continuing almost calm set out again and at Sun Rise discovered her at an Anchor under the Fort at Cape Lookout we returned the third time when a light breeze springing up the Snow wrought in Shore towards an Inlet (about 12 miles from the Cape) where we saw a number of Vessels laying. We hoisted French colours and made a signal for a Pilot. A Boat came out and reconnoitred us but no scheme could bring her along side. Captain Dean now was determined to have a Dust with the Brig, which

we saw was a Rebel Priv. from 12 to 16 Guns, and accordingly stood within Gun Shot of the Fort who fired a Shot at us, which we returned, but most unluckily the Wind shifting to the Southward : we were obliged to turn out being in such a Bight, that we could not weather the Land on one Hand nor the Shoals on another. Although blowing fresh in the night : by next morning got so far to Windward as to be out of danger. We then fell in with our present consort : and determined on attempting to have the Brig at all events as she had cost us so much trouble. But on the 29th a heavy Gale driving us into the Gulf Stream, we never could fetch to Windward of the Shoals again : therefore Cap. Dean bent his Attention towards Ocracock—where on the 4th Cur^t, we cut out the Polacco Ship *Le Hardy* : M. Middleton the Master, and I with 16 hands went Volunteers in the Sloop : and Chas. Knowles, Gunner, and Boatswain with 9 more of our People in the Boat. The Ship having a suspicion of us had got chace Ports cut out the night before and every preparation made. We went up under her stern when he began a heavy fire on us with his Stern Chacer : and by backing his Mizzen Topsail endeavoured to bring his broadside to bear on us, but being unable to effect this he renewed the fire with his chacer : Havg. by this time got pretty near, we soon drove them from those Guns by our Musketry and a 3 Pd. which raked him. Passing under his Starboard Quarter we laid him aboard directly and the Boat on the other : at which instant he discharged his Broadside a volley of small arms and some Powder Flasks at the Sloop. Most miraculously and providentially they did us no damage to speak of and before they could load again so many from both Sloop and Boat got on board, that little opposition was then made but by the French Cap^t., who behaved in a most resolute manner. Notwithstanding the extreme difficulty of the Bar (being only about 13 feet Water on it) we got her safe out about dark. The Channel lies so close to the Beach that the Pilots lying behind the Sand Banks peppered away at us with small arms, but did no hurt. You must look upon it as very unaccountable and indeed what I could hardly have believed had I not been an eye Witness that only one Man should be wounded and another a good deal burnt with a Powder Flask on our side. The French Cap^t. and 3 of his People are badly wounded, and several more slightly. If our Prize Schooner had been with us, to have gone in with the Sloop we should have effected something more capital. We cannot cruize above a fortnight longer as our Prov. and Water get low, and our Bottom is remarkably foul. Present my Copt. to your Brother—as likewise Don^t McLean, A. Stephen and acquaintances at your Mess. Expecting to enjoy the pleasure of seeing you soon, I am

D. Sir

Yours very sincerely

JOHN RICHARDSON

Enclosed with these letters is a list of the French prisoners captured, and also lists of the officers and men belonging to the

"Vengeance" that were on board the pinnace and the sloop during the action.

This was a fine stroke of luck for the British privateer, inasmuch as both the polacca "Le Hardy" and the schooner "Fannie" escaped re-capture, and, having been condemned and sold at New York, the "Vengeance" was credited with £4,603 3s. 10d. as her share of the proceeds. But, alas for the mutability of fortune! Just as this audacious rover of the seas was turning homeward for renewed supplies and a fresh start in further buccaneering, she encountered disaster as unexpected and startling as lightning would have been coming from a clear sky. She was on the lookout for her enemies, and with a fighting captain and willing crew, or with swift heels, as circumstances might require, felt reasonably secure; but if her captain prayed at all, he might well change his supplications now and pray to be delivered from his friends, for it was into their hands that the "Vengeance" fell, with results undreamed of from the worst of her foes. The story is told by the original draft from the hand of John Richardson, which was evidently copied and signed by officers and crew in the vain hope of possible redress at the hands of His Britannic Majesty's government:

On Friday 21st May 1779 Between 6 and 7 P M saw Two Sail Bearing about E. standing towards us, which we conjectured to be some of the Rebel Cruizers, but being so near dark could not determine their Size. The Tryon Brig Cap^t Sibbles and we kept close together and Hauled our Wind for them, which the Brig Diana (from Surinam for New York whom we had spoke in the forenoon,) observing, bore down towards us for protection. About 9 P M we observed them close to us on our Starboard Bow, and the Leewardmost who appeared the largest seemed to be running athwart us—upon which we kept away a little and fired a Gun across his Forefoot to bring him too to speak with him. Having soon after shot up abreast of him, he Hauled his Wind on the same Tack as we (*viz* the Wind at Starboard) and appeared to be a very large Ship. We hailed him when he answered the Harcourt, Store Ship from London, and Cap^t Dean then repeatedly and distinctly replied the Vengeance a Privateer belonging to New York George Dean Commander. He ordered us to "Hoist out our Boat or he would fire a Broadside into us": Cap^t. Dean answered: If you will take in your Top Gallant Sails and shorten sail I will do it immediately: Then says he "lower down your Topsails," which was done and afterwards without any other warning he poured into us a whole Broadside of Round and Grape, and Volleys of small Arms and Swivels from her three Tops and Poop. We now saw her to be a two Decker and by the light could plainly perceive the English Colours: Cap^t. Dean during this repeatedly hailed and told him we were a friend to the British Flag which had been displayed before coming near him, but he paid not the smallest attention to it—some of the

people say they Heard repeated orders given on Board the Ship to "fire a low and aloft, and be sure to Hull her." Our People seeing themselves doomed to destruction without mercy, said they might at least have the satisfaction of returning the fire, therefore notwithstanding Cap' Dean's repeated orders to the contrary fired the greatest part of our Broadside, and it was with the utmost difficulty they were stopt as they saw no hopes of Quarters. Not satisfied with one Broadside he continued in the same manner near half an hour untill he discharged at least five into us. The Tryon being a little way astern began to fire after the Ship's second Broadside, but stopt on being hailed by Cap' Dean and told that it was a British Man of War. All these things he well paid no attention to altho' he must have heard us not being half the distance we were from the Brig, and notwithstanding it was repeatedly told him who we were, and that we were sinking. At last he stopt and we finding several Shot between Wind and Water, the Carpenters reported their apprehensions of being unable to keep the Vessel up: upon which Cap' Dean again hailed them, and they answering he begged them to send their Boats as we were Sinking to save the People, but not the smallest notice was taken of it. Being apprehensive of his going to begin his horrid work again our Boat was hoisted out as soon as the shattered situation of the Vessel would allow and the 2^d. Lieu^t. and Copies of our Commission sent on Board: Instead of expressing the least contrition for his Conduct, his Language only seemed to indicate his being sorry that he had not sunk us all. They asked how many we had killed or wounded, however our officer going away on such a hurry could not give particular information on that head, but said he wished to get back as soon as possible, as he was afraid before that time we had gone down: In answer to this he was informed he must first go on board the Frigate and the Ship instead of bearing down to us to afford the assistance which humanity even to Rebels would have dictated, kept his Wind and went from us with the other Vessels. The officers in the Frigate behaved with great complaisance to our officer showed great compassion for us and offered to send their Surgeons in case we had none. During the absence of our Boat we happily found on more particular examination that our Hull was not so much damaged as we imagined, and got the Holes plugged up. All the Comfort our Boat brought us was that it was His Majesty's Ship Renown of 50 Guns Cap^t. Dawson with orders to keep *by him* all night (which was a thing not in our power, our Vessel having almost everything shot to pieces and entirely out of command) as there were several Rebel Frigates cruising there, and pretended that he understood we hailed from Boston, and took us for them, altho' we were within Pistol Shot all the time.

Honour forbid asking Protection from such a Man; the Enemy we were not afraid of, as for upwards of 8 days we had been cruising along that Coast for the purpose of falling with some of their Privateers to have revenge for the loss of 3 of our Prises amissing and imagined to be retaken by them and at any rate it was impossible they could use us worse:

The Relation is tiresome, and for the sake of Human Nature it were to be wished that such Conduct was buried in perpetual oblivion ; but Justice forbids it and the Honour of Britain requires that such wanton and unprovoked cruelty, unworthy of a Briton, and for the Mischief produced by which Barbarity itself would even drop a Tear ; should be held up to Mankind in its true and genuine light. Cap^l. Dean received a contusion in his left hand. One fine young lad wounded by a Musket Ball which penetrated his left Arm near the Shoulder, and breaking the Collar Bone, lodged in the right side of his Neck : the Ball was happily cut out, but it is much to be feared it will prove mortal : Another had his left Arm from the Shoulder Blade to the Elbow, shattered all to pieces by a Cannon Ball in a most shocking manner ; his Wound is likewise mortal : and a third had his left shoulder Blade grazed by a Grape Shot or Ball which took off the Flesh from the other and part of the Bone, and in all appearance his Fate will be the same as the others. We were hulled in nine places ; our Main Mast almost entirely shot away about 9 feet from the Deck by a 24 pounder ; our Foremast wounded very much about the middle, our Main Cap gone, several of our Yards hurt ; and our Boats, Sails, Standing and running rigging near entirely ruined. In short Words are insufficient to describe the Horrid scene. The damage is great and cannot possibly be ascertained, as besides the expense of refitting the Vessel it has knocked up our Cruize. The Tryon happily received no further Damage than 2 or 3 people slightly wounded Cap^l. Sibles humanely offered us every assistance and staid by us till next day, when we had got our Main Mast fished and our other Damage so far repaired as to be able to make a Shift to get to New York. We likewise must not forget to mention Cap^l. Philips of the Diana, who staid in sight of us till next forenoon when finding us still afloat, he naturally concluded, the only assistance in his power which was to save the people in case of our sinking could not be longer requisite.

On Board the Snow Vengeance Saturday 22^d May 1779.

Signed by

When, a few days later, the "Vengeance" sighted Sandy Hook, it was not to make that triumphant return towards which her officers and crew had looked with jubilant expectation ; instead, she crept up the Narrows disabled and humiliated and anchored at New York as one who has been wounded seeks a hospital. During the three or four months that followed it cost a pretty penny to repair the damage wrought by Captain Dawson of His Britannic Majesty's Ship "Renown," but the renovation went steadily forward. The prize schooner "Fannie" was purchased at public sale for an even £500 and fitted up to serve as a tender for the "Vengeance." New cordage, new spars, new sails and anchors were provided for both ; two new "double fortified 4 pounders" were bought at a cost of £100 ; powder ammunition costing £672 1s.

rod, were added to that which remained from the first cruize; a new boat was purchased for £84; the "good night glass" was not forgotten; abundant provisions were supplied, including the "parcel of bread from the *Le Hardy*" which Captain Dean had desired and when the privateer and her tender were again ready for the sea the debit side of the privateer's account stood charged with the handsome sum of £7151 17s. 5³/₄d. York currency. The schooner was re-christened the "*Langolee*," Captain Black commander, with twenty-two officers and men, and both set sail Monday, September 28, for a trial trip preparatory to their longer cruize. A portion of the log of the "*Langolee*" is preserved which tells us what the daily rations of a privateersman were in the 18th century. Breakfast was at 8 A. M., dinner at noon. Each man was to have six pounds of bread per week, with a half pint of rum per day, his grog to be stopped for wrangling or quarrelling, or for getting drunk; "*Bargow and Butter*" for breakfast, with a pound of beef at dinner on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and on the alternate days rice and butter for breakfast with a pound of pork with pulse for dinner and on Sundays rice and molasses for breakfast with flour and beef for dinner.

On the second day after sailing they succeeded in capturing the American privateer sloop "*Revenge*," Captain Edward Yorke, from Philadelphia, a vessel of thirty-five tons burthen with a crew of thirty officers and men; armed with eight three pound and two pound cannon and eight swivel guns, commissioned, as the condemnation papers recite, "by the persons Stiling themselves the Delegates of the United States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the three lower Counties on Delaware Maryland Virginia, North Carolina South Carolina, and Georgia, Rebels to our Lord the now King to Cruize against the Vessels and Effects of His Majestys Liege Subjects." The portion of the "*Langolee's*" log which is preserved ends October 9th, when the tender, having become separated from the "*Vengeance*," was being pursued by some larger craft and it would appear that she was captured by the vigilant Yankees, for reference is afterwards made to the exchange of some of her crew including Captain Dean's brother. The "*Vengeance*" however returned to New York, and completed such further preparations as were needful. On November 5, 1770, Captain Dean wrote from Sandy Hook, "I have just now returned from on board the *Admiral*, who gives me Permission to sail without even being examined. The *Anchor* is just heaving up and we proceed to sail immediately. If there is any Opportunity of writing to

Bermuda I beg you will not Omit it as 'tis highly probable I will touch there for Water."

Fortune, that fickle dame, did not smile upon the "Vengeance" now as once she did. An unkindly fate that had touched her with a heavy hand when she encountered the "Renown," still followed her on her second cruise. When next the doughty captain wrote, his tone was by no means cheerful.

ST SIMONS ON BOARD THE VENGEANCE
Dec^r 26th 1779

D. Sir

I wrote You from the Hook informing you of my intention of proceeding to Sea immediately which I did with the Loss of my Anchor. I'm sorry to tell you that a Series of hard Luck has attended me ever since—being obliged to quit the Coast off Virginia, where I intended to cruise for some time, by the continual heavy Gales. Dec^r 22^d I arrived at the Island of St. Simons to clean and Water—and have had the Misfortune [to] lose my Boat with twelve hands. I hope however they cannot escape, as I mean to pursue them immediately to Savannah—where I suppose they have gone. I will be able to write you more fully from that place. In haste I am D^r Sir Your most Ob^t. Ser^t

GEORGE DEAN

A fortnight later he wrote as promised.

SAVANNAH, 10th Jan^r 1780.

Dear Sir

I wrote You from St. Simons, informing You of my safe Arrival at that place, and my Intention of cleaning and Watering there. I inform'd You likewise of the Loss of My Boat and twelve hands, who found means to give me the Slip on Christmass Night. Three Days after, however, I had the good Fortune to catch them all, on my Way here, Two of the Ring-Leaders I properly secur'd and brought with Me. The rest I left in Irons on board the Snow.

My Expedition to this place has been truly a disagreeable one—having been driven ashore on the Island of St. Catharine's, and very narrowly escap'd with My Life, and since my Arrival here, three of my Boat's Crew (Hugh Wyllie, John Neilson and John Harris) on whose Fidelity I thought I cou'd depend, have deserted, and left me in the Lurch. This last Circumstance has distressed me greatly—detaining me so much longer than I expected. Tomorrow, however, I set off for St Simons and hope to proceed to Sea immediately on my Arrival there.

As I stood in Need of some Necessaries—I have drawn on You for £40 Stg. in favour of M^r John Funno, a Copy of the Acco^t. You have enclos'd.

I hope I shall soon have the pleasure of writing You on a more agreeable Subject.

If I shou'd have the good Fortune to take any prizes I shall send them to this Place or to Bermuda, 'till I can have an Opportunity of conveying them to York myself.

A Stephen joins me in wishing to be remember'd to You and M^r. Richardson.

Believe me to be, with great Esteem
Your most Obed^t Serv^t.

GEORGE DEAN

By the endorsements in the hand of John Porteous it appears that it was April 27, 1780, before either this letter or the one that preceded it reached New York, and this was the last that was ever heard of Captain George Dean or of the privateer, "Vengeance."

July 11, 1780, John Richardson, who had not accompanied the "Vengeance" on her last cruise, wrote to Mr. Porteous from Sandy Hook as he was about leaving on a mercantile venture to Charleston, S. C.: "Yesterday a brig passed from Bermuda which I took to be Morgans, and it gave me the utmost uneasiness. I was from the same reason prevented from getting on board her to see if I could learn anything of Poor Dean. I beg you'll not forget to let me know first opportunity to Charlestown if you have heard of him." On August 22 he wrote from Charleston "Pray have you heard anything of poor Dean? Mr. Tunno's Brother informed me it was his firm intention to cruise a little time off Virginia and if still unsuccessful push for the West Indies, as he was determined to bottomry the Vessel rather than not do something, well knowing that returning without a prize was almost equivalent to a total loss of the Vessel. As this is the case I form hopes that he is yet safe poor fellow."

January 20, 1781, Captain George Knowles, who had been the first lieutenant of the "Vengeance" on her former cruise, now having another command, wrote from Charleston, S. C.: "I am bound for Jamaica and I hoop to learn som Account of the Snow Vengeance." It proved a vain hope, and two years later, in April, 1783, a letter from England to Mr. Porteous written by Trevor Bomford, announcing the death of his brother Thomas Bomford (late captain in the 35th infantry), who had been a shareholder in the "Vengeance" says, "I will esteem it a particualar favor if you will acquaint me, particularly about the Snow Vengeance and if She has been heard of."

Whether the ship was lost in some fierce battle with the elements, or was sunk by the guns of her enemies, remained shrouded in mystery and may never be known. With that last word of hopeful expectation from her courageous Captain, her record was closed, the "Vengeance" with her officers and crew disappeared from history and passed forever out of mortal sight and ken.

HENRY R. HOWLAND



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